



Mount St. Helens



Visitors to Mount Rainier National Park often visit Mount St. Helens. Both mountains are active volcanoes, part of the Northwest's "ring of fire." Comparing the two can give you a new perspective on the pace of geologic change, as well as bring you face to face with the raw power of volcanic forces and their effect on our world.

The Eruption

Many people remember where they were on May 18, 1980, when Mount St. Helens erupted with unexpected fury. The eruption sent enormous amounts of rock, snow, and ice down the mountain's north flank at speeds greater than 200 miles an hour. Part of the avalanche plunged into Spirit Lake, raising the lake's surface level by 200 feet. Part surged over the top of a 1,200 foot ridge. Still more debris rushed down the north fork of the Toutle River, filling the river valley to an average depth of 150 feet. Nearly all vegetation and wildlife up to 6 miles north of the volcano were destroyed.

Within hours, an ash cloud rose 15 miles above the summit and spread northeast, turning daylight into night for at least 125 linear miles. Lahars (mudflows) and pyroclastic flows of hot gas and rock surged down the mountain.

Even for those who merely watched the event on television, the images of timber and mud choking the Toutle River and the sky raining gray ash are difficult to forget. Today, a visit to Mount St. Helens offers a chance to relive those feelings of awe at the power of the earth to remake itself. It is also an opportunity to discover how life survived and is slowly returning to the blast zone.

Three Places to Visit

Mount St. Helens, operated by the United States Forest Service, has 3 main visitor areas:

Northwest Corner

Highway 504 takes you to Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center and Johnston Ridge Observatory. Here you can see the blast zone and how life is reclaiming this once barren area.

East

Forest Road 99 leads you through old growth and lush vegetation up to Windy Ridge, with hiking and camping options along the way.

South

Forest Roads 83 and 90 bring you to ancient lava tubes, caves, canyons, hiking, and camping.

Getting There From Here

From Nisqually

- Exit the park (Hwy 706) and drive for 13 miles
- At Elbe, turn left (south) on Hwy 7 for 17 miles to Morton and...

From Morton to the East and South sides:

- Turn left (east) on Hwy 12 for 17 miles
- At Randle, turn right (south) on Road 23/25 and follow the signs to the monument

From Morton to the Northwest Corner

- Turn right (west) on Hwy 12 for 27 miles to I-5
- Go south on I-5 for 19 miles, exit at Castle Rock, and follow the signs to the monument

From Ohanapecosh

- Go south on Hwy 123 for 5 miles to Hwy 12
- Turn right on Hwy 12 (west) for 24 miles to Randle and...

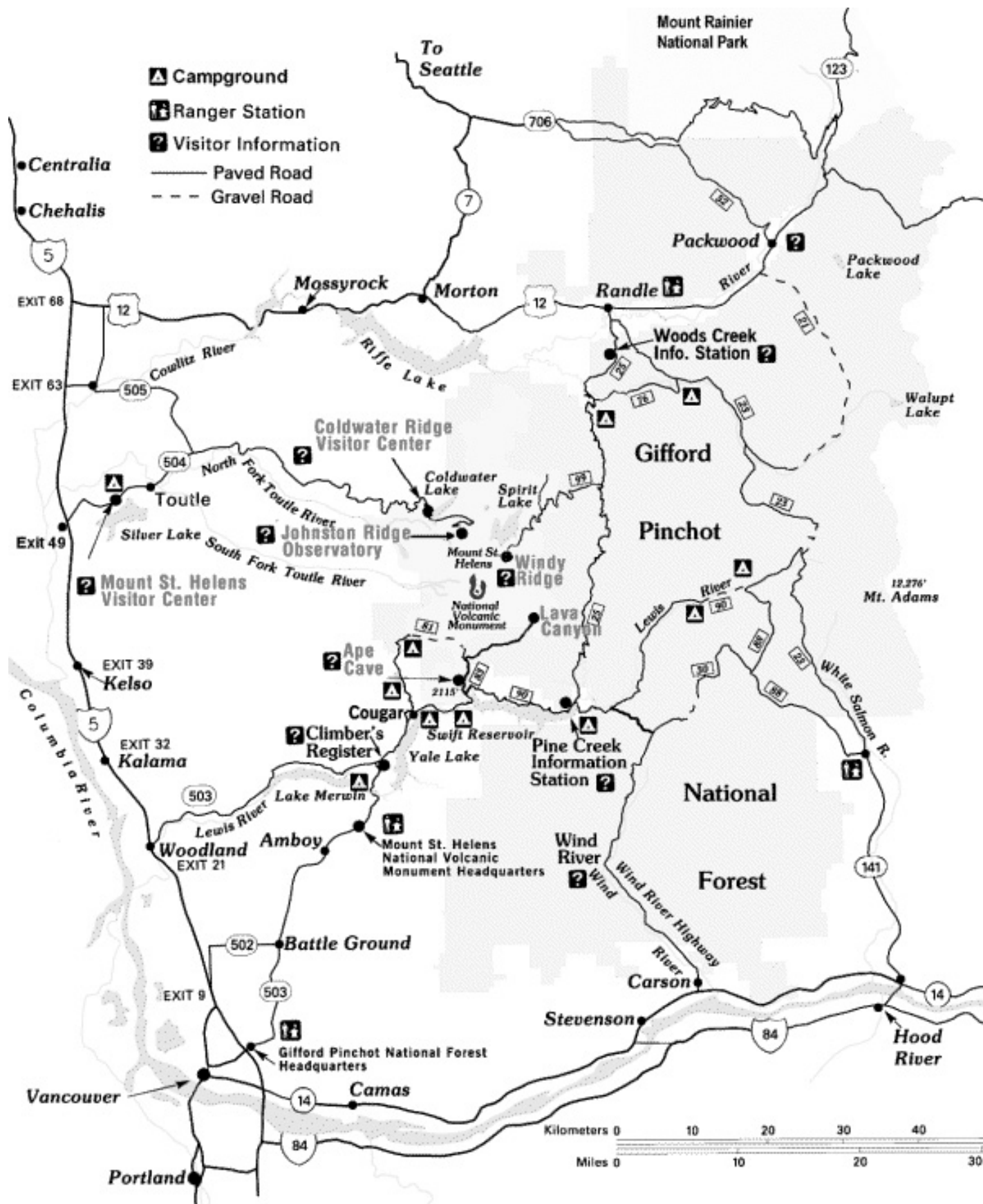
From Randle to the East and South Sides:

- At Randle, turn right (south) on Road 23/25 and follow the signs to the monument

From Randle to the Northwest Corner:

- Stay on Hwy 12 for 44 miles to I-5
- Go south on I-5 for 19 miles, exit at Castle Rock, and follow the signs to the monument

Driving time = 2 hours for all trips.
Road 23/25 is closed in winter.



Mount Saint Helens National Monument: 360-449-7800
 Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center: 360-274-2114
 Johnstone Ridge: 360-274-2140
 Gifford Pinchot National Forest Headquarters: 360-891-5000